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PROGRAM The Today Show

STATION WRC TV
NBC Network

DATE October 15, 1982 7:00 AM CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT An Interview with CIA Wives

BRYANT GUMBEL: On "After 8:00" this morning, a look at the lives of spies, real ones. And as you can imagine, those lives are often quite different from the Hollywood version.

[Clip of James Bond movies.]

GUMBEL: In the movies, special agents throw a good punch, are quick on the draw, meet a lot of women on the job, nice ones, and nobody does it better than James Bond, 007, what you'd call a high profile job. And who wouldn't want to try it. But how much fact is there in the James Bond fantasy? And do real agents have as much fun?

Well, one big difference between the real agents and the fictional ones are the real ones are married more often than not. I'd like you to meet a couple of CIA wives right now. Barbara Colby's husband, William, was with the CIA for twelve years overseas, Director of the CIA here for three years. And Bina Kiyonaga, who was a CIA wife for 28 years, serving with her husband in El Salvador, Panama and Brazil. He died of cancer five years ago.

Ladies, welcome.

James Bond life is a lot more glamorous than the ones your husbands lead?

BARBARA COLBY: Well, I would say the reality really is quite different from the image. From time to time, exciting things do happen. But when you really scratch away that mystique that you've been talking about, you find the nitty-gritty under-

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neath. More exciting than the Fish & Wildlife Service.

GUMBEL: What was the note I saw you quoted as, that they use a phone a lot more than a gun?

COLBY: Right.

GUMBEL: What was the most difficult adjustment, Bina?

BINA KIYONAGA: To living....

GUMBEL: To being a CIA wife as opposed to being a normal person?

KIYONAGA: Well, there're lots of things. For one reason, you have to have implicit trust in your husband, because, of course, CIA operatives don't observe office hours. The more critical the operation, the more apt it is to happen at night. So your husband's gone, maybe sometimes all night.

GUMBEL: How much of a strain was that?

KIYONAGA: Well, I had a real attractive husband, so, of course, for me it was a strain in two respects. First of all, I had to have faith in him that he was actually working. And secondly, I had to not worry too much that he might have met with foul play. And so in order not to louse up the operation that might have been in process, I couldn't pick up the phone and double-check on him. I couldn't do anything. I had to just be patient.

GUMBEL: So what happens? Do you just get accustomed to being told nothing, being told half-truths, not asking the questions? How do you take that?

COLBY: Well, I think, really, you have to operate on what is known in the CIA as the need to know. You really -- you really cannot know all the details about the operations with which your husband's concerned, or others. There's a compartmentalization in a way.

On the other hand, that's much safer for you, because what you don't know you cannot reveal if there would be those pressures possibly on you.

I agree with Bina. Certainly you have to have implicit trust. And it's a very -- it's a very satisfying feeling, really, to know that you are carrying out the mission that your country needs to have done.

GUMBEL: Bina, you have five children.

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KIYONAGA: Yes, that's right.

GUMBEL: What did you tell your children when they said "What does daddy do? Where does daddy go?"

KIYONAGA: I lied. It was one big lie. I lived a lie. And by that, I don't mean to impute the idea that there was any wrongdoing or immorality. I lived Joe's cover, and I was duty-bound to deceive. I lied all the time.

GUMBEL: What kind of stress did that put on you?

KIYONAGA: It didn't bother me all that much. I felt that I was supporting my husband. His work was secret. I had to maintain that secrecy.

GUMBEL: Did you feel as if you were employed by the CIA also?

KIYONAGA: No, I just loved my husband. What he wanted me to do, I did, because I knew anything that he did had to be right.

GUMBEL: Let's recognize now a very different kind of fear, but one just as real. In January, 1976, murdered CIA agent Richard Welch was buried in Arlington National Cemetery. The funeral underscored an ever-present fear a CIA wife lives with, that when her husband leaves home in the morning, he may not return.

How difficult was that feeling? Or was it a feeling that tends to come more with fiction than fact?

COLBY: Well, I would say that in the earlier years, in the old days, let's say, during years that we were assigned abroad with the CIA, it perhaps was a little bit different, because, for myself, I didn't have any training. We really operated by the seat of our skirts, so to speak, the wives in those days. Now I'm really happy to say that CIA has made some very positive changes. About a year ago, the Office of Family and Employee Liaison Office has been established. There are training courses. There are spouse orientations, situations where you learn how to maintain your cover.

GUMBEL: We keep -- we keep on relating it back to the CIA. Were you not, or are you not allowed any identities of your own, or must your identity always be tied directly to your husband as an arm of the CIA?

KIYONAGA: Well, we were allowed our own identities in that we took very active roles in any local activities. Say,

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first of all, before we even were sent overseas, CIA was very smart in that they trained the wives in the local language, say Spanish, Portuguese, what have you. You went armed with that knowledge. You could make friends with the local women. That was tremendously important to your husband. Suppose he wanted to get to a political figure. All right? He would ask me to become friendly with the wife. In order to become friendly, I would feign interest in her guacamole recipe, all right? There's another lie. I hate guacamole. So there you go.

GUMBEL: But you were back to acting as an extension of the CIA.

KIYONAGA: Exactly.

GUMBEL: A final note. And you obviously both loved your husbands dearly. Knowing what you know, having gone through it again, would you have preferred he was in another line of work?

COLBY: Oh, no.

KIYONAGA: Never.

COLBY: It was a very gratifying life, and knowing that your husband is doing a mission that's serving the United States.

GUMBEL: Ladies, thank you both very much, Bina Kiyonaga, Barbara Colby. Appreciate it.

KIYONAGA: Thank you.